

RESPONSE TO THE 2000 MONTEREY COUNTY GRAND JURY FINAL REPORT

Response to Findings 1 –7 and Recommendations 1 – 7

Response to Finding # 1 (Hiring and Promotions): The District Attorney partially disagrees with this finding.

To the extent that there is any inference that the Family Support Division has hired or promoted an individual not following the rules of the County or not in a fair and objective basis is unfounded and, accordingly, the District Attorney disagrees. The District Attorney does agree that when hiring or promoting that all attributes should be considered, including work experience, attitude, adaptability, teamwork, mastery of technical skills, and seniority. The Division strictly adheres to the County rules regarding the competitive recruitment, examination, and promotion process. The County and the Division are interested in hiring and promoting the most qualified candidates, whether they are selected from within current County ranks or from the outside job market. Internal hiring and promotion is done fairly and on a non-biased basis, without exception. The Division does not promote on seniority exclusively. Promotions are based upon successfully passing a competency test and favorable evaluations by the employees' immediate supervisor.

The decision by the County Administrative Office to decentralize County employment services by dedicating a full time personnel analyst to the Division has helped to expedite and improve the hiring process. The Division is proud of having one of the highest promotional rates in the County. Since January 1999, approximately 50 percent of all positions filled within the Division were by promotion from within the Division.

Response to Recommendation # 1 (Hiring and Promotions): This recommendation was implemented prior to the Grand Jury's inquiry and will continue to be fully implemented.

For promotions to all positions including management or supervisory positions, attitude, adaptability, and teamwork are considered critical attributes. Emphasis is also placed on customer service qualities and working with others harmoniously. Employees who do not demonstrate those attributes receive the proper counseling and coaching to assist them in reaching their full potential.

The Division has expanded its training program to capitalize on the expertise of the assigned human resources personnel, including a full-time personnel technician to assist and support the personnel analyst. This will allow the personnel analyst to provide extensive, ongoing advice and expertise to supervisors and managers.

Response to Findings # 2 (Job Performance Evaluations): The District Attorney agrees with this finding.

The Division has instituted a performance management system that includes adherence to the annual written employee performance review process. Management acknowledges that supervising personnel have been remiss in providing timely evaluations to staff; however, no employee has been denied a step increase or a promotion due to a supervisor or manager not providing a timely annual evaluation.

The Division has implemented frequent employee assessment reviews to help determine individual staff needs. These more frequent reviews will also help the supervisor and employee develop cooperative employee development plans.

Response to Recommendation # 2 (Job Performance Evaluations): This recommendation has been fully implemented.

An improved performance assessment system has been implemented which will help employees and supervisors identify ongoing training needs as well as creating a forum for positive communication between the employee and the supervisor. It will provide an opportunity for positive feedback to staff on a more frequent basis, and will ensure that expectations are clearly understood. The performance evaluation, including identification and implementation of required employee goals and objectives, will be monitored carefully by senior management to ensure evaluations are objective and adequate recognition of employee strengths and weaknesses are fully documented.

For the past several years, the Division has provided specialized training to managers and supervisors in the preparation of objective constructive performance evaluations. The Division's performance evaluation form mirrors the County's model, which is designed to ensure constructive comments. It should be noted that the Division was a forerunner in the County in creating a performance evaluation form several years ago that included goals and objectives for the employee.

The Division has developed a new and improved performance evaluation-tracking log that will ensure staff performance evaluations and reviews are current.

Response to Findings # 3 (Internal and External Training): The District Attorney partially disagrees with this finding.

The District Attorney has aggressively provided technical training for all employees for the last decade, thus, disagreeing with the Grand Jury's finding that the Division may have been deficient in providing adequate training in past years.

The District Attorney has recognized the need to provide additional training for supervisory staff and, accordingly, agrees with the Grand Jury's finding in that respect. Steps taken to address the area of training, to include all employees, are as follows.

- Internal training of all staff has been an ongoing process for more than ten years.

- The Division has developed excellent training staff that provides ongoing specialized training, and will continue to focus on ensuring that all employees are receiving the necessary training to optimize their effectiveness.
- Refresher courses and technical training courses are provided to staff on a frequent basis.
- The training staff is very aware of procedural changes made at the State and Federal level and is proactive in providing the necessary training to staff.
- With the implementation of a new state mandated computer system, internal staff training has been extensive and lengthy.
- The State of California has been selected to pilot a federal program to develop a model training program for child support staff, which includes exploring the establishment of a professional certification program, which will add additional value to the knowledge and skills required of child support professionals.
- Internal training is mandated for managers and supervisors in specialized areas, e.g., sexual harassment; discrimination; violence in the workplace; attention deficit disorder; etc.
- All Division managers were among the first class to graduate from the sixteen-week course offered by the Monterey County Leadership Institute.
- All Division supervisors have attended courses sponsored by the Institute to enhance supervisorial skills.
- All Division managers have completed County sponsored Zenger Miller training.

Response to Recommendation # 3 (Internal and External Training): The recommendation has been previously implemented and will continue to be refined in future implementation.

Records of internal and external training have been maintained for several years and will continue to be maintained by a staff training team. A course evaluation process used by all managers and supervisors ensures that training is effective as well as determines how individuals plan to implement any learned skills/knowledge. Supplemental training is provided when appropriate and necessary to optimize the effectiveness of individual staff member.

Schedules for personnel to attend training seminars and conferences have been designed to ensure that all appropriate classifications of employees have the opportunity to attend outside training which is deemed necessary for staff development purposes and or organizational needs. During the last decade, over eighty percent of the Family Support Officers, Investigators, and Accounting Staff, and one hundred percent of the Division's Attorneys, Supervisors, and Managers have participated in external training out of Monterey County. Most of the training is highly specialized and provided by the California District Attorney's Association, the California Family Support Council, and the National Child Support Enforcement Association. Debriefing and the dissemination of information obtained from outside training conferences and seminars have been and will remain a current requirement. Support staff, unless they are performing a highly specialized duty, generally do not attend external training. Any inference that favoritism is used to select attendees is erroneous.

It should be noted that the Division could not maintain its high level of performance if comprehensive training were not made available to staff.

Response to Finding # 4 (Caseload): The District Attorney agrees with the finding.

The recommendation that caseloads be distributed fairly among all family support officers has always been the approach used by the Division. The Grand Jury recognizes that different cases require different levels of attention and handling. The Division will continue to assign cases that require special handling and are more complex to resolve to a special resolution team. This current team consists of two family support officers and one supervising family support officer. They interface directly with the staff of the Board of Supervisors, as well as with State and Congressional staff, to resolve issues of dispute as quickly as possible. The State of California recognizes the importance of such specialized casework and has recommended all counties structure their operations to include staff that can quickly resolve matters of dispute. The State is providing additional funding for this endeavor.

Response to Recommendation # 4 (Caseload): The recommendation has been implemented.

For the past several years, this recommendation has been in place. Caseloads will continue to be assigned to family support officers depending on complexity and, as a result, will always result in varying numbers of cases assigned to each family support officer. The Grand Jury has recognized this as an acceptable business practice Statewide in child support enforcement divisions.

Response to Finding # 5 (Morale): The District Attorney agrees with this finding.

As stated in the Grand Jury report: “The nature of the work performed by FSD staff is difficult. Staff members at all levels, but particularly Family Support Officers (FSOs), are on the front line dealing with custodial and non-custodial parents in adversarial positions. As a result, staff members are often caught in the middle of parental conflicts and may be subjected to a variety of abuses. Conflicting client demands coupled with ongoing change is certain to be stressful.”

The work of the Division is highly regulated by both federal and state laws and regulations, which in many cases are designed to remove discretion from family support officers. This poses a unique challenge to family support officers, as well as to managers and supervisors because of the need to provide good, friendly customer service to the residents of this County. We agree with the Grand Jury’s finding that, “The District Attorney’s Office and FSD management have endeavored to create programs and opportunities to foster a positive and supportive environment”. The Grand Jury’s statement that a core group of employees “...may hold a dark view of morale” is of concern, but we are also pleased that the findings of the independent interviewing of staff conducted by the Service Employees International Union Local 817 found that the, “...condition of negative morale had been overstated.”

The vast majority of individuals adjust to changes in a very positive manner, whereas others may have a more difficult time adjusting to changes. We will continue to work with all

employees to accept and adapt to mandated changes.

Response to Recommendation #5 (Morale): This recommendation has been implemented for the past several years and will continue to be implemented.

The Division fosters morale through its Shining Star Program, which has been recognized Statewide and praised at the County level, is a program wherein line staff select their peers for employee of the quarter and of the year; Division newsletter; suggestion program; picnics; team sports; holiday and other “theme” potlucks, all of which contribute heavily to maintaining morale in spite of the difficult and challenging nature of the work. Additional coaching and career counseling will be provided to any individual who is showing discontent in their current job assignment or career choice. The Grand Jury suggests and we agree, “...that it may be necessary for some employees to consider their discontent and determine if they are really in the right place for their own needs and well-being”. In appropriate situations, a supervisor may recommend that the employee seek help from the County’s Employee Assistance Program. Reassignments within the Division and or outside the Division, wherever possible, will always be considered to help the individual obtain career satisfaction.

Response to Finding # 6 (Supervisory/Managerial Methods): The District Attorney partially disagrees with this finding.

It should be made clear that no individual has been promoted into a supervisory or managerial role because they “...are unwilling or perhaps unable to conduct their duties in a fair, respectful, non-threatening and non-judgmental...” If or when supervisors act as described, appropriate steps are taken to change their behavior, including counseling and, if necessary, disciplinary action. Additionally, all supervisors and managers have been provided the tools and training to help them be proficient as supervisors or managers.

Response to Recommendation #6 (Supervisory/Managerial Methods): The District Attorney agrees with the recommendation.

All supervisors and managers of the Division attend the Leadership Institute’s ongoing training for supervisors and managers and, additionally, external courses focusing on skills and solutions to promote a supportive environment for all employees. Required routine coaching sessions will help recognize verifiable goals and objectives and will provide a forum for constructive feedback. Additionally, the case manager supervisors have developed a quarterly “Supervisor Assessment” survey document that will be provided to individual team staff members to help assess the effectiveness of individual supervisors and to provide constructive feedback on how to improve in specific areas of supervision, coaching, or mentoring. The management team of the Division will continue to promote attendance in courses that provide proper and positive coaching techniques; effective communication; interpersonal skill development; and effective performance management tools for staff responsible for the performance of others.

Response to Finding # 7 (A Changing Work Place): The District Attorney agrees with this finding.

The Division is a fluid, changing environment and faces challenges daily regarding procedural and process changes. The Division prides itself in providing information to all staff on a timely basis regarding pending changes as well as providing positive reinforcement as to why the changes are necessary. Team meetings and suggestions and ideas are solicited from team participants. Management believes strongly and encourages all middle management and supervisors to capture ideas and suggestions from those who are involved with the specific business process at hand. New automated systems, new organizational changes that are dictated from the federal or state level become "...non-negotiable mandates..." which we are responsible to follow. It is agreed that, "...each individual is ultimately responsible for how they will react and respond to this changing environment".

Response to Recommendation #7 (A Changing Workplace): The recommendation has been fully implemented.

Business process change is an ongoing process that is not only a result of changing laws and regulations, but also is a dynamic process that must be in place so that suggestions and ideas on how to improve any business process can be implemented quickly and successfully. The Division is proud of developing programs that recognizes individuals for the submission of new ideas and suggestions. The Division also conducts weekly meetings with representatives from all functional areas and proactively seeks out ideas and suggestions from within regarding on-going improvements of current processes and procedures. All meeting minutes are available to interested staff and input is encouraged from all staff members.

What should not be lost in the evaluation of this organization is the hard work and dedication of all staff and individuals, which is manifested in the Division and individual staff receiving national and statewide awards for outstanding performance. The record-breaking collection increases are a strong indicator of a well-managed organization. The Family Support Division will continue to strive for excellence in the delivery of service to all, but most importantly to the children who are in need of child support paternity establishment and child support enforcement services.